

Treasurer expands Unclaimed Properties focus

Veterans targeted

By Bob Watson

bwatson@newstribune.com

Georgia Mae Phillips didn't know her husband had about \$1,500 in unclaimed funds until the state treasurer's office called her.

Carl Phillips died almost three years ago, after 60 years of marriage, a 23-year Army career — he retired as a lieutenant colonel — and a 19-year career as an English and senior world literature teacher at north St. Louis County's McCluer High School.

"I was lucky that Carl took Jane and Jean and me all over the world, and we were glad to be able to do that. It was fun," Phillips told reporters and veterans group representatives during a program in the Capitol Rotunda, after she received a check for the unclaimed funds from state Treasurer Sarah Steelman.

"I'd do it all over again, if I had the chance."

Using the state Veterans Commission computer database's 36,000 names, Steelman's office found 2,600 matches with names in the state's Unclaimed Properties database.

"The first batch we ran found a little over \$150,000" in veterans' unclaimed property, said Scott Harper, the program's director.

Phillips said: "I think it's wonderful that people are working hard to find something that belongs to someone else. In our country, that's what we need to do."

Stelman said: "We certainly know that military families are always under a lot of stress, and a lot of that is financial stress. So any additional income that they can get — that rightfully belongs to them, anyway — is what we're trying to do through this program."

Veterans and service members can go to the Unclaimed Properties Internet Web site — www.showmemoney.com —

and click on the special "Veterans Click Here" link to see if the state is holding any unclaimed property for them.

"We want them to be able to come and easily get on our link," Steelman said, "but we also will be, proactively, contacting those people as well, and letting them know that we're holding money for them."

State law requires banks, insurance companies, stock companies and government agencies to turn over money, uncashed checks and other unclaimed property if they are unable to locate the property owners after a certain period of time.

Stelman said that, like other unclaimed properties in the state's custody, veterans' assets "probably comes from a variety of sources."

She said Missouri's current service members — and the veterans who served previously — all went "the extra mile" in their service to their country.

"So it's time that we did a little bit for them," she said, naming the new effort "Operation Extra Mile."

Hal Dulle, the Veterans Commission's interim director, said the database-sharing with the treasurer's office is one more effort to make sure veterans and military families have the financial assistance they've earned.

The new program likely provides the treasurer's office with more current address information than it might otherwise have, Steelman and Dulle said.

Stelman said her office also would investigate ways to get similar information from the U.S. Veterans Administration, to see if it could lead to more matches.

"As a result of their service to our country, many military families are moved from location to location," Dulle said. "It stands to reason that there are many veterans — and, more likely, surviving spouses — who may be claimants to property being held by the state treasurer's office."



Stephen Brooks/News Tribune

Georgia Phillips, 90, picked up a check for \$1,500 Tuesday in the Capitol Rotunda. The money was her late husband's unclaimed property. He was on the Veterans Commission list after a 23-year Army career that included service in Korea. A new outreach program checks veterans' names with Missouri's Unclaimed Property database to find possible matches.